Suggested session on:

Polemics and Commentary

**What A Wonder: A Pharisee-Sadducee interpretational polemic in medieval Biblical commentaries**

Dr Zvi Stampfer

In this paper I will examine the influence of the Jewish secretarial polemic on Biblical commentators and commentaries in the Middle Ages. I will trace the polemic on Deuteronomy 17:8-11 (ki yippaleʾ) from late antiquity, as it appears in the Dead Sea Scrolls, Aramaic translations and Tannaitic sources to the Medieval Karait and Rebate commentaries. I will try to demonstrate how medieval Jewish commentators adopted Islamic methods of interpretation and used them as a device in their commentary.

**Jewish biblical Commentary Between Peshat and polemics:**

**Rashbam on Genesis 18-19 in the Context of Jewish-Christian Controversy**

Dr Ari Geiger

The Biblical commentary of R. Shmuel ben Meir (a.k.a. Rashbam) is well known for his method of "Peshat" (the literary meaning of the text), characterized by a polemical approach toward Christianity. In this paper, I will use Rashbam’s commentary on Genesis 18-19 – the episode of Abraham and the three visitors – as a case study. This is a typical case in which the common commentary that was shaped under the pressure of interfaith polemics clashes with the literary meaning of the verse. I would like to examine how the commentator handles the tension between the polarity of Peshat and Drash, while navigating his way through interfaith polemics. In my talk, I will also present my supposition, explaining the shift in the Christian explanation of the episode discussed, that enabled Rashbam to adopt a "Christian" interpretation. I will conclude by pointing out the difference between Rashbam's interpretation and that of the Christian exegetes that may have come about in an attempt to avoid adopting the Christian interpretation in full because of its problematic theological meaning.

**The influence of Jewish-Christian polemic on the interpretation of a Jewish Bible in Portugal in the fifteenth century**

Dr Yohanan Kapah

This lecture will focus on the biblical interpretation of Rabbi Yosef Hayyun, the last Chief Rabbi of Portugal in the generation before the Jewish expulsion from Spain. His commentary is usually characterized by close reading. However, in his commentary on the Psalms he deviates from his custom. One can see how his interpretation corresponds to a Jewish-Christian polemic about the "true Israel," the theological role of the Diaspora, and Christian missionary activity.

In his introduction to his commentary, Hayyun says that, at first, he thought of interpreting the books of the prophets in order and would only later interpret the Scriptures, but the need of the hour and the public's request caused him to deviate from his intention and interpret the Book of Psalms. In my lecture, I will examine the influence of the Jewish-Christian polemic on the interpreter's agenda, and present Hayyun's interpretation as a case study.